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Education The Seed

Excerpts in the latest issue of the U.S. News and World Report from an address by Allen W. Dulles on education in Russia make interesting reading and some of the findings of the head of our Central Intelligence Agency may be significant.

Mr. Dulles' general idea is that the Soviet system of education is effective to a degree that we do not perhaps appreciate at full value. Students are indeed put through a rigorous training in Marxism but the extent to which ideology is allowed to affect teaching varies with the subject. In the mathematical sciences where everything is subject to exact verification Marxist teaching naturally has little to say. In the biological sciences the official theory of heredity was formerly that of Lysenko, who taught the transmission of acquired characteristics. There is greater latitude now in that field since Lysenko's doctrine failed to work in improving agriculture.

Neither do the theories of Marx seem to hold in regard to capitalistic economy, though they are still firmly maintained in the Soviet Union. As time goes on and the Western economic systems do not collapse as predicted, there must inevitably creep into the minds of the educated Russians a doubt as to the soundness of their ideology. Mr. Dulles also points out that even in the arts there is a trend toward less rigid regulation. Along with these signs of a more enlightened attitude in official circles, and perhaps in part accounting for them, is the fact that the Soviet Union is now a dictatorship without a dictator. Stalin has never been replaced and no one in Russia now knows who the real dictator is. It is a committee, which can never operate as smoothly in the exercise of power as the strong man.

All these observations lead up to the question as to what effect the up-to-date system of Russian education will ultimately have on Russian thinking in regard to Communism. Mr. Dulles, and in this he is certainly not alone, is convinced that education will gradually modify Russian conceptions of the state and economics by the introduction of more individual freedom. Since he made the talk we have one striking confirmation of this process in the relaxing of the procedures that have prevailed in Russia in the prosecution of criminals. A thoroughgoing reform guarantees the individual both against indiscriminate arraignment for high treason and against persecution on the part of the investigating officers.

As there is a greater expansion of education within Russia and a greater exchange of ideas and experiences with the West, we may hope for a real change in the Communist attitude of suspicion, fear and intolerance which is behind their behavior. The most convenient instrument of this change is the one that costs us nothing—their own schools.